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Abstract

This paper argues that the relationship between religion and violent politics is best understood through a focus on religious practice. The case study of the Tamil Catholic Church within Sri Lanka's civil war is presented against a backdrop of Buddhist monk participation in violent insurgency decades earlier. The discrete cases evidence a common preoccupation with management of physical borders and discursive boundaries as actors seek to reproduce themselves and their work as legitimately 'religious'. Despite relying on remaining 'pure' from the dirty political realm, in practice religion is bound to social action and reproduced through the violent circumstances it engages.

Keywords: *Sri Lanka, Religion, Violence, Boundaries, Politics*

Introduction – Unresolved Intimacies

> 'People don't see the Church as party political but in terms of rights, yes, the Catholic Church is very political, and strong.'[1]

This study of Sri Lanka's Catholic Church argues that its role in the midst of conflict is relational in nature, rather than static. This means it exists and makes identity in relation to people, ideas and places. The ensuing implications are best understood by examining religious practices, particularly those that are linked to physical borders and discursive boundaries. It is here that religious legitimacy is challenged or reproduced, by acts of crossing or reinforcement. Through careful 'management' apparently apolitical actors can engage in political and violent arenas. In this way religious actors reveal how boundaries and borders are more complex than it seems: they are porous, multitudinal and linked to power. Viewing religious actors in this way finds precedence in the anthropology of Christianity, which has rejected a view of religion as a 'transhistorical essence' in favor of recognizing it to be an emergent field of debate and practice. This focus on religious participation and its effects helps us appraise the conditions under which it becomes a meaningful category acting in history (Asad, 2002, Mosse 2012). Framing faith and social life this way allows us to appreciate the political, historical and culturally specific role of religious actors and practices.

[1] Catholic NGO worker and political commentator, Colombo, January 2014, (interview 2621)

In the north of Sri Lanka, which endured three decades of conflict, Catholic priests have been active in socio-political spheres and sometimes referred to by critics as 'white tigers'. This generic name alludes to sympathizers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebel militants, and is made potent by the white cassocks priests wear at almost all times. As Catholic priests pursued a social agenda they became increasingly identified with an ethnically defined political cause, to the detriment of ethnic cohesion within the broader religious institution to which they belonged. Alongside the earlier example of Buddhist monks involved with the 1971 and 1989-90 violent Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurgency, Sri Lanka exemplifies the paradox between imagined 'peaceful' religion and the practicalities of existing alongside and participating with violence. Though the contexts differ, Catholic and Buddhist cases illustrate the untidy relationship between religion, politics and violence: specifically, that the negotiation of religious borders and boundaries by their functionaries is common across discrete episodes and traditions.

The Church and individual priests were extensively involved in humanitarian work, which brought them into proximity with politicised and violent boundaries and borders thus positioning the Church in a unique manner. As an embedded, local institution the Tamil Church witnessed all phases of the conflict, even when internationals were expelled[2]. It is thereby a repository of extensive knowledge about wartime atrocities. A Sinhalese Catholic priest told me 'the Catholic Church did a wonderful job at the end of the war when even the United Nations left. The priests and nuns were the last group the people had; the only stronghold.'[3] Indeed, throughout the war years, Hindu and protestant Tamils as well as Catholics relied upon the clergy for assistance and representation. The majority of Sri Lankan Tamils live in the north and east of the country, areas comprising the physical theatres of warfare, and locus of ethno-political grievance. In this militarised environment the Tamil Church has increasingly been distanced from the central, ethnically Sinhalese Church. It identified heavily with the 'Tamil cause' (the political objection to ethnic inequality and a perceived systematic sidelining of Tamil needs and demands). Though only a few priests were known LTTE supporters, (including most of those killed), many were socially and politically active, opposing militarisation by both the LTTE and government and interceded for Tamil civilians in economic, social and conflict issues. One priest explained the 'Catholic Church has a duty to preach but more than this has a duty to go into society and connect with practical life. The homily in Church should encourage this kind of engagement. When you live in such an environment, this is a duty.'[4]

[2] Indeed, the Church was active throughout the conflict in reporting information from the war zone to international actors such as the UN (Harrisson, 2012).
[3] Sinhalese priest, Colombo, February 2014 (interview 2141)
[4] Catholic priest, northern Sri Lanka, February 2014, (interview 2146)

To illustrate that the boundary tactics Catholic priests have employed are of broader relevance than this one case, it is presented against the backdrop of the 1960s- 90's involvement of Buddhist priests with violent JVP insurgencies (1971 and 1989-90)[5]. Here the involvement of religious leaders with violence was starker than the complex, protracted struggle of the Tamil Church in the midst of civil war. In the 1980's the JVP called on monks to 'lead', 'rally' and 'fight against the government' (Abeysekara 2002, p.222). It worked systematically to gain support from Buddhist monks, and sought to establish a monk branch at every level of its organisation (Tambiah 1992, p.96). Young monks, many still studying at university, found within the movement a practical opportunity to challenge generational inequality and ritual dependence within the sangha (broadly, the Buddhist community of monks and nuns), and broader society (Frydenlund 2005, p.2; Tambiah 1992, p.97). Monks performed a variety of practical tasks, and offered temples under their control to store arms and hide insurgents (Tambiah 1992, p.97). Monks distributed a magazine, 'vinivada', which became a conduit for JVP ideology and reinforced the idea of monks playing a special, political role (Abeysekara 2002 p.224-25).

The paper first elaborates on the idea of religion as relational in nature before outlining the broader socio-political context in Sri Lanka. Next, a more detailed account of JVP monks and their violent protection of the 'motherland' is presented along with an overview of the activities of Catholic priests in northern war zones contributing to charges of their being 'white tigers'. The following section discusses the common historical introduction of notions of 'social service' into the logics of both religions. This developed prior to and at the time of independence, and significantly contributed to the widening remit of monks and priests into political arenas. The main discussion focuses on the management strategies Catholic priests have been engaged in at conflict related boundaries and borders in the north.

Relational Religion

Attending to the practices of religion and the work put into authoritatively shaping fields of legitimacy give a more nuanced understanding of religion's role in complex conflict environments, as well as more accurately portraying the nature of religion. Together the two cases illustrate that although the circumstances differ, both Catholic and Buddhist clergy have actively engaged physical borders and discursive boundaries with political and violent spheres. Regardless of the aim to reinforce or transgress these they have to work to reproduce their positionality as legitimate or pure. Although this work seeks to uphold the distinction of their religious position, it reveals the relationality of religion with broader social realms. This illustrates that religion is made as a meaningful category, rather than being inherently so, and

[5] Formed by Rohana Wijeweera in the late 1960s, the JVP was predominantly a southern Sinhalese youth movement challenging caste, class and age inequality in Sri Lanka. It operated in the south of the island and was not directly related to the developing ethnic conflict in the north and east.

is reproduced through its interventions. In this manner religion is a potent force, with transforming effects on people, places and symbolic landscapes (Tweed, 2009).

A relational conception of religion focuses on its everyday practices in dynamic space and time. It moves away from binary logics to recognize the dynamic flows of people, things and ideas and the importance of power in socially constituted space (Wilson, 2010). Speaking of religion relationally acknowledges it's outworking in complex environments and better helps us to assess the interwoven nature of phenomenon such as religion and politics as we research conflict settings. Abeysekara (2004) claims;

> …A critical practice of politics does not mean that we should explore more vigorously the supposed interconnection between religion and politics or violence and the sacred or political use of religion. In the way I conceive them, religion, politics and violence do not remain available for us as self-evident, universal categories with their meanings unalterably defined a priori.

Focusing on religion as relational and historically constructed, and the ways it is bound to social action, encourage focus on its everyday function and reproduction in complicated and violent political circumstances.

The struggles that underlie any assertion about the legitimate identity and role of religion highlight the malleability of the category. Although proponents typically police the discursive boundaries of legitimacy, they commonly 'take liberties' with prevailing concepts of acceptable behavior and agendas, even as they proclaim the intention of making, or extending, 'authentic' liberty. As such, the category of religion, which relies upon and reproduces notions of separateness and purity from the political, can be expanded and reinforced to allow participation in political struggle. This is of central importance to examining the everyday function and reproduction of religion in complicated political circumstances.

If religion is relational it is inevitably bound into broader socio-political realms. Thus the management strategies of religion's functionaries become interesting as they seek to engage different spheres whilst retaining the position, or appearance of alterity. The implication of religious clergy in Sri Lankan political violence is illustrative in this regard. "JVP monks" – Buddhist monks supporting the JVP, 'took liberties' as they sought to discursively redefine 'true monkhood' as the giving of life to protect the Buddhist nation. They engaged in insurgent violence and sought to unravel the sangha's order by attacking senior monks who supported the government. Social practices of Catholic priests have largely been more mundane and illustrate the difficulty of working in protracted conflict 'grey zones', seeking to 'make liberty' and negotiating with rebels to 'get things done'. However, proximity to rebel violence necessitated radical discursive and physical boundary maneuvers, as priests traversed and sought to influence conflict landscapes.

Religious purity is central to notions of legitimacy underscoring religious public authority, and has been considered by various Sri Lankan scholars (Abeysekara

2002, 2004; Goodhand et al 2009; Hasbullah and Korf 2009; Hasbullah and Korf 2013; Maunaguru and Spencer 2012; Spencer 1990, 2008, Spencer et al. 2015). Others have considered how caste, culture and religion have been engaged to 'purify space' (Brun and Jazeel 2009, Hasbullah and Korf 2009, Korf 2006, Spencer 2003). The politics-religion boundary presents a potent challenge to academic and everyday debate because there is an acute difficulty of stepping out of 'the political' - so penetrating because of the multiple registers it works in. Spencer (2012) reflects on his research amongst Buddhist and Muslim communities between 1982-2008 through the lens of Mouffe's agonistic conception of democracy. He concludes that agonistic and divisive politics are not seen by most as how things should be, but are regarded as inescapable though undesirable. A Catholic post-master from a small northern village explained, 'Priests are seen to be trustworthy and without an agenda, however there were moments of suspicion. They remained cautious to protect their credibility.'[6] This common aversion to the world of 'dirty politics' reinforces the importance of religious leaders bounding their activities as religious in nature, and pure from contamination by politics.

The two cases exemplify that through careful engagement with, or construction of borders and boundaries, violence can be reproduced as either inherent or inimical to religion, effectively either expanding or reinforcing the category. Religious actors may confront both physical borders, which are spaces of separation or taboo (such as military checkpoints or 'sacred' grounds) as well as discursive boundaries - categorical distinctions (what does and doesn't count as religion or politics). Through boundary management it is possible for 'apolitical' religious figures to engage in overtly political, and violent arenas. Thus, although boundaries and borders assert separation and rigidity, in reality they are tentative and malleable. Outright transgressions typically have serious repercussions, but ongoing negotiation reveals the complex geographies that informing boundaries and borders structuring everyday life, and the rooting of religion in them. Throughout the paper physical borders and discursive boundaries will be differentiated for purposes of clarity, however the two typically overlay and inform one another.

This research into the Catholic Church was undertaken over four fieldwork trips to Sri Lanka between January 2010 and February 2014. The majority of this was in the north; consequently the paper deals mostly with 'northern Tamil clergy'. Over 80 in depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with priests from various hierarchical positions, as well as other religious leaders, civil society representatives, parishioners, internationals, scholars and politicians. Participant observation at various meetings and ceremonies, as well as location visits, and some archival work supplemented interview data. Furthermore, several Tamil priests and scholars working, studying and living in the UK were interviewed. In response to the majority of interviewee's wishes and prevailing condition of insecurity in Sri Lanka, all the data is anonymous. This data is framed against the earlier example of Buddhist JVP monks, which is drawn from an existing,

[6] Post master, northern Sri Lanka, December 2010, (interview 1738)

authoritative body of literature including Abeysekera (2002), Chandraprema (1991), Guneratna (1990), Rogers (1987), De Silva (1981), Stirrat (1992) and Tambiah (1992).

The Sri Lankan Context

Sri Lanka is home to several religions, but most of the 74.9%[7] Sinhalese majority community identify as Theravada Buddhists. Sri Lanka's infamous ethno-nationalist conflict has in turn drawn heavily upon Buddhist idiom. The Tamil minority[8] is typically Hindu, whilst the second minority on the island are Muslims[9]. However, the Catholic Church (approximately 6.1%[10]) intersects the majority-minority divide, with both Sinhalese and Tamil membership, broadly reflecting the overall ethnic make-up of Sri Lanka. Catholicism came to Sri Lanka in the 16th century along with Portuguese colonizers, who settled along the island's west coast. Indigenous temples were destroyed and conversion became a means for locals to gain standing with their rulers (DeSilva, 1981). In 1638 the Dutch began attacking the island, and by 1660 controlled all areas but Kandy. They persecuted the Catholic Church and believers fled into the jungles and highlands. It was the British, in 1815 who finally managed to secure control over the whole island and under whose rule the Church flourished[11]. Freedom of religion, a good working relationship with the British rulers, and an impressive schools network saw the Church evolve into a powerful, conservative institution. Though global reforms within Catholicism along with Sri Lankan nationalism greatly affected the Church, its identity as a colonial implant traditionally associated with pro-western conservative politics is central.[12]

Framing a discussion about Catholic priests' 'boundary management' against earlier examples of Buddhist monks highlights historic and contemporary similarities. Both have held (at different times) privileged relations with the state; both have been deeply challenged through the development of Sinhalese nationalism, and both enjoy the social respect afforded to religious leaders. Furthermore, Buddhism

[7] 2012 census www.statistics.gov.lk
[8] 2012 census; Sri Lankan Tamils 11.2% population, Indian Tamils 4.2% population
[9] 9.2% population, re. 2012 census www.statistics.gov.lk
[10] 1.3% as 'other Christian', 2012 census www.statistics.gov.lk
[11] Although the colonial state was Anglican it had a good relationship with Catholic missionaries who were loyal to colonial rule (Stirrat 1992). Furthermore, nine out of ten Sri Lankan Christians at the time were Catholics (Holt 2011).
[12] Protestant Christian denominations amount to approximately 1.3% of Sri Lanka's population. Although the Catholic Church has worked alongside older, 'mainstream' churches such as the Methodists there is some conflict with the newer, evangelical Churches. Many priests refer to these as 'fundamentalists', who are seen to aggravate relations with Buddhists through aggressive conversion tactics, and to poach membership from established Christian churches. Evangelicals have not been considered in this paper, since their presence and activity in the north has been markedly different to that of the Catholic Church – diffuse, independent congregations. Their leaders have not had organised involvement in conflict, and do not identify themselves with the Catholic Church (for Sri Lanka's east: Korf et al. 2010; Spencer et al. 2015). For interesting analysis of evangelical Christianity see Fernando (2014), Mahadev (2014), Woods (2013).

and Catholicism have experienced internal struggles between conservative constituencies in favor of the status quo and more radical elements (typically younger clergy) wishing to upend it. In the instances of involvement with the violence of the JVP and LTTE the stakes of such struggles have been particularly high. They vividly illustrate attempts to manage the 'discursive' borderlands in which religion is so powerfully constructed as inimical to politics, yet so intimately acquainted with it. For both, a religious identity positions them in a role constrained by notions of 'purity', typically held in tension with the 'dirty' world of politics.

Themes of purity and boundaries are well established in literature on Sri Lankan religion (Whitaker 1999, Spencer 2003, Korf 2006, Brun and Jazeel 2009). Goodhand et al's (2009) investigation of boundary crossings made by religious leaders in eastern Sri Lanka in times of violent crisis suggest their ability to engage in 'dirty' politics relies on a religious identity positioning them as external to it. When their purity is in question, authority to intervene fails. This is a fluid and ambiguous moment, predicated on discursive boundaries and vulnerable to misjudgment and manipulation. Other interventions have looked more specifically at the boundary engagements of religion (Hasbullah and Korf 2009, Klem 2011, Heslop 2014). These consider the politics of post-tsunami aid and religious networks; identity and boundaries in a religious field structured by violence; patrimony; political contestation and ethnic identity; and the idiomatic use of the 'sacred' to express political claims. Thus the importance of boundary meetings in the social and political roles of religion is well established. Exploring these practices and the contradictions they raise in the case of northern Tamil Catholicism is an underexplored component of the puzzle and helps to illustrate how religion operates and is reproduced in conflicted circumstances.

JVP Monks and White Tigers; Taking Liberties and Making Liberty?

The Catholic and Buddhist examples of violent entanglements differ significantly in terms of their aims, theologies and political positions. Buddhism is constitutionally protected and embedded in a tradition of Sinhala nationalism. The Mahavamsa and prominent readings of ancient history offer legitimacy to violent political engagement in order to protect the Buddhist nation. More specifically, the JVP-associated monks explored in this paper were overtly engaging in violence; doing so in large numbers and recognizable groupings (particularly university students). Not only is Catholicism now marginal to the state, but Catholic loyalties are typically framed along ethnic lines concurrent with the major divides of the conflict. Theologically, left wing and Tamil clergy have drawn on interpretations of Jesus' humanitarian and political commitments to justify controversial positions. Most importantly they should not be represented as having a widespread commitment to political violence, only a pressing need to negotiate it to enact their humanitarian principles.

> Rather than 'political', I would describe the Church as an 'active presence'. This is about more than mass and confession. Catholic social teaching and

> Christian thinking state to love your neighbor as yourself, and this is the root of the Fathers' behavior. Some see the Church as political because of the issues it takes up, but you can't simply tell the hungry to pray about it.[13]

Importantly, the focus in this investigation is on clergy who have sought to redraw boundaries and borders to justify proximity to violence. There is no singular analysis of 'Buddhist' or 'Catholic' engagement available, and within both institutions there have been a wide range of responses to these circumstances.

Violence offers an insight into the religion-politics relationship because it positions clergy explicitly in a manner that defies traditional narratives of peace within the religions, as well as challenging lay understandings of their appropriate roles. Engaging in or alongside violence meant transgressing both discursive boundaries and physical borders and can't be understood in any way other than through a focus on the practices of religious actors. The work of religion at such spaces presented deep challenges to the institutional identity of religious orders, and is revealing of the relational nature of religion.

As a backdrop to the case of 'white tigers' the JVP example is instructive, illustrating boundary management strategies at the heart of attempts to expand the category of religion to legitimate violent engagement. The case also highlights the importance of power in boundary struggles to redefine the legitimate scope of religion.

i) Monks and the JVP

The struggle between the JVP and Jayawardene's government was not only a military confrontation but overlaid with discursive and symbolic struggles, which Abeysekara (2001) analyses in detail. Both parties claimed to represent 'true Buddhism' and to undermine the others claims to do so. JVP monks attempted to align violent resistance to the state alongside a constructed, ideal and undefiled Buddhist state. In this construction the violent monks were brave and fearless, protecting the true Buddhist nation against the government. Monks supporting the established structures of the sangha and state were painted as traitors to this.

As the government gained the upper hand against the insurgents using ruthless paramilitary squads, they waged a simultaneous discursive war. The 'fearless' JVP monk was invested with new meaning as 'criminal', unBuddhist' and 'threatening' to the Sri Lankan nation. Captured monks were tortured in detention camps to make them 'Buddhist' again, which in this case meant obedient and subservient to the government, and chastised for their challenge. Captured monks were publically shamed, ceremonially disrobed (Abeysekara 2002; Tambiah 1992) and re-educated in the way of 'true' (apolitical) Buddhism. These powerful symbolic acts were an undoing of their religious authority to rebuke the claims they had made on political space. The insurrection illustrated the instability of the religion-politics

[13] Catholic lay humanitarian worker, Colombo, February 2014, (interview 2053)

relationship and the claims of Buddhism to speak from beyond the divides of 'politics as usual' (Spencer, 2012).

ii) Priests and the LTTE

> 'Families stay together and care for one another, the Church also endures because of the difficulties it faces, and because leaders are with the people and give themselves to the community, and console people. For example, for the sake of those they work with, they will talk to the army. They don't think of their own life, and even in heavy fighting priests would go to get food.'[14]

Thiranagama (2011) describes war as a 'transformative social condition', wherein conflicting demands of everyday life are redefined both individually and in relation to each other. Catholic priests' humanitarian agenda required a very practical engagement with the local situation. The instability of conflict meant that military configurations across the north varied between time and place. When the LTTE established a 'de facto state' there were no other powers to deal with, and in times of contest between government and LTTE troops, both powers had to be engaged. In various circumstances different degrees of local leeway, pragmatic working relationships and strategic exchanges of authority developed, simply to 'get things done'. An influential Sinhalese lay Catholic argued, 'the Catholic Church, during the conflict was (despite some elements of backwardness) a progressive force and … it was clearly anti-violence, and far ahead of Buddhist monks, and almost everyone'.[15] Ultimately, the Church's humanitarian mandate was only actionable because it maintained relations both with the government and the rebels, and was seen by each side to be a trustworthy partner.

A northern priest spoke to me of the difficulties of working for Tamil civilians in such a militarised environment and reasoned that at the time 'any work was LTTE work'[16]. In such an environment it was impossible to engage in humanitarian or social work outside of the purview of military powers. It is not the case that in such a stifling environment there are no boundaries, or all work is subsumed into military logics. Rather, the environment, along with the imperative for engagement, raised the question for clergy of how to make a legitimate intervention? By constructing humanitarian, social service as a religious imperative the Church forged a discursive enclave around their interventions. In this manner, their actions could be both 'LTTE work' and a small act of rebellion, assertion of independence, or even of anti-politics through recourse to serving people, whose humanity preceded their political resonance.

'Grey' situations inevitably emerged. On occasion LTTE fighters took refuge overnight in churches, certainly placing priests under duress, but also utilising

[14] Tamil Catholic priest, northern Sri Lanka, December 2010, (interview 1821)
[15] Sinhalese lay Catholic political commentator, Colombo, December 2010, (interview 1948)
[16] Tamil priest and human rights activist, United Kingdom, April 2013, (interview 2112)

tactical favors and occasionally playing on latent support. The Church's relationship with both military actors was complex and multi-faceted. On a basic pragmatic level, powerful actors recognised each other and worked together, where it served their aims to do so. There was a respect for the Church amongst the LTTE and army commanders who sought to maximise the help priests could give through their well-established authority, including their local influence and language skills. Irrespective of the personal ideological bent of individual priests, co-operation with military personnel was locally justified within the narrative of a duty of social service, to improve the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Broadly, the 'Tamil cause' was supported by the Church through humanitarian narratives which have served as the primary means of managing discursive boundaries and facilitating access across physical borders. Within these there was great leeway for individual priests to hold a variety of views toward, and positions in relation to, the LTTE and armed struggle. In an open letter to the President and members of the United Nations Human Rights Council in March 2012 Bishop Joseph of Mannar explained -

> We are … a group of concerned Christian clergy in North Sri Lanka who have been directly affected by war and have been working to ensure rights of people in our region before, during and after the war, while being concerned and committed to broader issues of human rights, democratisation and rule of law in Sri Lanka.[17]

This humanitarian narrative gives shifting and complex legitimacy in the 'grey zones' of conflict that is fragile and easily undone. The counter view charges inappropriate involvement of the clergy, and employs broader narratives of terrorism. However, the power of the Church's reputation, local authority and international links, alongside its ability to reproduce their 'religious' identity whilst working in political arenas have protected most priests from the worst implications of being labeled as 'terrorist', which in war time Sri Lanka were dire.

The value of comparing 'white tigers' with JVP monks lies not in parity of circumstance or aim, but in the commonality of boundary tactics, despite these differences. Beyond specific circumstances there is a common retreat to the idea of religion as a bounded sphere, which must be justified and protected, but nonetheless can be both expanded and reinforced. Not only does this reveal boundaries and borders to be tentative but demands an exploration of religion embedded in broader social contexts, within which it functions on everyday levels and is actively reproduced. Any serious reflection on religion must reconcile it with controversial, even violent politics, often performed through an assertion of the very boundaries and borders exposed to be inadequate by such activities.

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[17] Jeyaraj, D.B.S quoting Bishop Rayappu Joseph, 4.3.12, 'Letter signed by clergies urge decisive action by UNHRC towards genuine reconciliation in Sri Lanka', http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/9077, accessed 4.8.14

The activities of Buddhist priests within the JVP, and the pragmatic compromises of Catholic priests' humanitarian work both illustrate the possibility of redefining notions of legitimacy and overlaying overtly political spaces with religiously defined discursive boundaries. These strategies did not appear ex nihilo but find precedent in earlier political, social and religious developments.

Internal Logics - the Impact of 'Social Service'

Mixtures of forces, many of them external to 'religion', allow particular expressions to flourish whilst alternatives are marginalised, variously expanding and reinforcing the relational category. Of particular relevance to later confrontations between Buddhism, Catholicism and violence, is the impact of social service. This discourse exemplifies the manner in which new discursive tools enable and legitimate boundary shifts within religion. It has been used to re-shape the discursive boundaries around religious legitimacy and is one example of multiple redefinitions of the meaning of religion that can be observed across times, places and traditions.

The language of social service began to color religious developments in Sri Lanka during a period of rapid social, cultural and political change beginning in the late 1800s and culminating with the 1956 election of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) alliance (Seneviratne 1999). This saw the newly formed Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) partner with smaller Marxist parties, running under the slogan of Buddhist nationalist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala; 'country, nation and religion'. This watershed election heralded broad changes including shifting the elite dominance of parliament; the addressing of electorates in their mother tongues; and the stirring up of communal feeling for electoral gain mobilized by religio-nationalist sentiment. In this tumultuous period both Catholicism and Buddhism evolved into new forms that would have important repercussions for the political development of the country.

In contemporary Sri Lanka, Buddhism is constitutionally protected by the state; its traditions are central to political language and symbolism. The moral and practical conduct of monks is often criticised and the aggressive and provocative politics of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS, a nationalist monk organization) regularly make headlines; most recently for attacks on Muslim communities.[18] Similarly the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a political party with many monks among its membership, has provoked wide debate, not only over the legitimacy of their

[18] To this day, neither nationalist nor patriotic movements have been associated with one political party, and 'political monks' have an organizational flexibility that allows for rapid mobilization. All political parties have monks in their ranks that can be mobilised for public support and to provide religious justifications for policy with varied success (Frydenlund 2005, Tambiah 1992).

political identity, but also over controversial political projects, such as a bill to ban 'unethical conversions'.[19]

The rise of this 'political monk' has been traced by pre-eminent scholars to forces set in motion in this period of change. Reforming figures such as Anagarika Dharmapala inspired growing nationalist agitation for Buddhist revival in the late 1800s. They re-imagined the role of the monk through re-readings of ancient history to incorporate 'pragmatic' engagements with everyday life, often considered to reflect that of Christian missionaries (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). The language and logic of social service was introduced and drew on registers previously considered external to Buddhism. By re-drawing its discursive boundaries Buddhism was opened to previously taboo spheres of social, economic and political life. These transformations reflected and fed into broader social and political sentiment. A new generation of activist monks channeled these ideas into aggressive and virulent ideologies, retrospectively seen to have secularised the monkhood and fed the ethnic chauvinism implicated in Sri Lanka's three-decade conflict. Walpola Rahula's seminal 1946 'Heritage of the Bikkhu' (published in English in 1974) outlined a political agenda to restore Buddhism and the sangha. Buddhist clergy became active organising and participating in nationalist agitation, whilst the monkhood became a source of socially and culturally useful professionals rather than moral, ritual figures (Seneviratne 1999). As monks became educated and employable, lay ability to check the sangha diminished.

In this British colonial period (1802-1948), the Catholic Church was a powerful institution and social minority, with a clear religious identity. Allied to the colonial state[20] the Church monopolised education. It had extensive networks, enabling access to high-level jobs and political influence. Colonial ministers worked with the dominant powers, helping legitimate them and creating a local, westernized bourgeoisie (Balasuriya 1981, p.81). Stirrat (1992, p.52) relates one interviewee claimed, 'priests were like kings'. As nationalist agitation gained momentum in the early 1900s the Church was targeted as a foreign implant, with undue power and influence. Indeed, many of the traditional elites at the turn of the century who were seen as conservative and subservient to the British were Christians. Over a period of 40 years leading to independence in 1948, the Church's colonial networks disintegrated and its privileged role in education unraveled, (leading to legislation nationalizing schools in 1960 and 1961). Stirrat describes an 'entropic process' of

[19] Non-traditional Christian Churches have been badly affected by a dramatic increase in religious intolerance. CPA (2013) recorded 65 attacks across all provinces in the three years following the end of the conflict, the vast majority of which were carried out against non-traditional Christian groups. After the report was released, persecution of the Muslim community ramped up significantly. Buddhist nationalists employ the terminology of 'white tigers' to condemn wide groups seen to be threatening the 'Buddhist nation', including leftists, journalists, and western associated groups, as well as the Christian community in general.

[20] The British Protestant government granted Ceylonian Catholics emancipation in Sri Lanka in 1806 (in England this didn't happen until 1829), choosing to work alongside the well established institution for mutual benefit.

slow fragmentation resulting from the seepage of Sinhalese Catholics toward dominant cultural and religious practices during this period, although the loyalties, doctrines and practices of Sinhalese Catholics have long incorporated distinctly Buddhist elements (Stirrat 1992, Winslow 1984, Nissan 1988). Since the 1983 riots, widely seen to have precipitated the broader ethnic conflict, Sinhalese Catholics have typically assimilated along ethnic rather than religious lines, leaving an acute division at the heart of Catholic identity (Stirrat 1992, Wickremasinghe 1983). Though not bound to the working of the state in the same manner as Buddhism, Catholicism exists relationally in a specifically Sri Lankan constellation of religio-politics. The activities of Tamil clergy in the north are even more interesting in the context of deep institutional cleavages which often see the Tamil and Sinhalese hierarchies at odds, or even in outright confrontation.

> Vatican II made the problems and care of the poor the central concern of the Catholic Church.[21]

Just as notions of social service heralded a transformation of Buddhism, the Vatican II Councils transformed the Catholic Church globally in the 1960s. The Councils radically re-aligned the mission of the institution and its clergy, and the legitimate scope of their action, bringing to the forefront a social agenda for the Church. Stirrat (1992) relates major transformations that occurred as a result. As claims to a truth monopoly unraveled, Church hierarchy became fallible, official attitudes to other religions softened and conversion agendas retreated. The introduction of vernacular liturgy facilitated lay access to doctrine in a radically unprecedented manner. Finally, a redefined, indigenized priesthood was no longer to display specialised, exemplary sacred lives, but to serve their own communities as mediators. Combined with political decline, these transformations left many disappointed with the Church's loss of political influence, and in the Sinhalese south propelled an embrace of ethnic identity. Fr. Tissa Balasuriya was one of a handful of outspoken and influential left wing Sinhalese theologians who challenged the Sri Lankan Church for failing to develop a critical social agenda and for engaging in charity without questioning the structures making it necessary. He saw the Church as an institution on the side of 'law and order'- a 'westernising agency', that never really used the Vatican II reforms to engage the liberating message of Jesus Christ (Balasuriya, 1981). Today, priests often trace the genesis of their humanitarian mandate to these reforms.

Considering the historical importing of logics of social service into both religions helps to illustrate that how politics and religion produce and limit each other does not concern inherent nature. Rather, specific interventions continually sculpt and mould these fields, which exist in relation and constantly reference each other. What comes to be perceived as 'normal' or legitimate in any moment represents victorious stories, which rely upon the production of specific boundaries and borders that either reinforce or expand prevailing conceptions of categories. These

[21] Senior Catholic priest and humanitarian worker, northern Sri Lanka, December 2010, (interview 1572)

relationships are tentative, hybrid, and shifting being vulnerable to internal and external challenges. Ongoing tensions over legitimate Buddhist service suggest shifting meanings that take form alongside broader strategic relationships. The activities of religious leaders embroiled in violent situations relate to broader struggles over the borders and boundaries of the legitimate identity and role of religion. The production of binary conceptions of religion and its 'others' (politics, public, profane) is underpinned and performed through boundary and border construction, performance and transgression. These reveal underlying power and identity struggles as well as an enduring intimate relationship with these 'others'. These trends can be observed in the recent history of both Buddhist and Catholic leaders in Sri Lanka; in particular in their dealings with violent groups. For both, the introduction of the idea of 'social service' gave new tools and languages with which to define and reproduce the 'legitimate' Catholic or Buddhist self.

The repercussions of these developments in Sri Lanka's three-decade civil war with Tamil separatists in the north are evident within both Buddhism and Catholicism. Monks have been highly visible in their opposition to devolution and negotiated peace. Furthermore, mundane and common Buddhist practice such as the tying of protective *pirit* on the arms of soldiers has been drawn into the symbolism of war, reproducing violence as legitimate and normalizing religious overtones to militarization. Similarly, politicians have used temples to deliver speeches, proclaiming their 'Buddhistness' as they did so. Indeed, as Jurgensmeyer explains economic, social and political aspects of the conflict are often put in vividly religious terms.[22]

Meanwhile, the political and social decline of the Sinhalese Church has not been evident in Tamil areas. The post Vatican II emphasis on 'social' work has led, in the context of war and suffering, to humanitarian work in a complicated and challenging environment. Such activity has clearly been political, and often brought priests into close proximity with violent arenas. In this context the Tamil Church has refashioned itself as a supporter of the Tamil cause. It has become a humanitarian actor, and been one of the only institutions in the north to survive the war. The social influence of priests is significant, not only as religious functionaries but as community leaders, with whom members of both the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) and government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) army could identify. Although the Church did take often-controversial positions, in general both sides avoided outright confrontation with individual priests, or with the outspoken and powerful Tamil Bishops.[23] Its efforts have covered a variety of issues, ranging from local, mundane interventions such as negotiating access for local fishermen to beaches used by the navy, through to issues of national import such as mediation in peace processes. It is not surprising, that in such a context, confusions and conflicts over

[22] Jurgensmeyer, Mark, 1990, 'What the Bhikkhu Said: Reflections on the Rise of Militant Religious Nationalism', Religion, 20: 53-75

[23] Sri Lankan academic and activist, United Kingdom, July 2013, (interview 2421)

the Church's role, identity and affiliation have arisen. Consequently, the importance of managing boundaries and borders has been extremely high.

Abandoning attempts to separate religion and politics in favor of a relational approach enables us to better ask what religions and their functionaries have done in particular historical moments, and how. The designation of 'political Buddhism' conceptualizes Buddhism's political engagements as a problem. Abeysekera (2002, 2004) challenges this as reactive and representative of a western disciplinary project, which does disservice to the historical evolution of such concepts[24]. Despite ongoing performance, or discursive reliance upon bounding religion from the 'dirty' political, there can be no doubt about the ever changing nature of religious boundaries and borders. Stirrat (1992) suggests the Sinhalese 'agama' only took on the meaning of 'religion' in the 19th century, and prior to this referred to a fluid interaction with culture. Even without Dharmapala and the Buddhist nationalists' injection of concepts of social service, no absolute separation of religion and politics can be read into Sri Lanka's history. Catholicism, as a western religion, is subject to alternative categorical logics, and as a Sri Lankan institution its expression is also bound to local contexts. This helps to explain why for both, notions of purity and contamination have been so evocative, and authority over the boundaries and borders of categories is at heart an issue of power. This has been a major facet of the struggles within both religions as they engage with controversial spheres of violence. The final section of this paper turns to a closer consideration of what Tamil priests did amidst the violence of the civil war in the north, the boundary strategies employed to enable them, and how the wider institutional Church dealt with the Tamil clergy's challenges.

The Catholic Church: Boundary Management and Intimate Strategies

> Many youths joined the movement. There were deaths, abductions, lootings and atrocities within the diocese. People depended in this time on the clergy for their problems and anxieties. The challenge was to help these families. If they asked the security forces for help, justice or truth they were cornered, and branded LTTE supporters. Tamils feared for their lives, and clergy were able to raise their voices because they didn't have a family. The government respected the clergy because of their education.[25]

Working in the northern war zone brought Tamil Catholic priests into proximity with violence, both by design and circumstance. Although interviewees did report priests who were active within the LTTE, these cases are the outliers. More representative are the many priests who sought to serve Tamil people in the complex 'grey zone' of endemic conflict. The Church's humanitarian narrative has

[24] Similarly, in a broader South Asian context, Mandair (2012) claims that phenomenon such as Sikh or Hindu nationalism exist because of the translation and transformation of indigenous concepts into the western category of religion.

[25] Senior Tamil Catholic priest, northern Sri Lanka, December 2012, (interview 1694)

legitimised new and challenging social and political interventions. For example, though the Church officially condemned the LTTE, activity of clergy did not exclusively conform to such an ideal. Interviewees spoke of priests facilitating recruitment, engaging in logistical planning, exchanging messages, and assisting with resources. In the context of enduring conflict, and often LTTE control, refusing to work alongside it could not only be dangerous, but could contradict their humanitarian agenda, and ability to 'get things done'. Priests' religious identity placed them in close proximity to the LTTE, and the dangerous, political boundaries they carried with them. Their religious identity was held up as an exceptional, bounded category, and put to work as such to carve out spheres of influence and physical spaces of safety. Boundary management that enabled such engagement was dependent on discursive re-definitions giving religious actors legitimacy to act in 'political' spaces. It illustrates the complex balance between the 'purity' of a religious actor to enter such spaces and de-limit what they can do once there.

The physical boundaries priests negotiated in northern war zones took two forms. The first were those that once crossed placed them in physically militarised spaces. As they engaged political and military actors and issues, the importance of legitimacy and maintenance of purity was central. The second were borders that needed reinforcing, typically around spaces of sanctity and exception, which priests sought to reinforce. The Church has become renowned for presiding over such spaces, with its buildings used as refuges for those fleeing violence or to temporarily shelter those without homes.[26] However, shadier accusations simmer; that priests also sheltered LTTE cadres in churches. Interviewees have spoken of this happening, typically referring to it in 'other' places. In the media it is not difficult to find accusations of priests hiding arms and stolen money behind alters. The occurrence of events in different places, and the reasons behind them, can vary wildly. Although some priests involved may have sheltered cadres because of personal support for the LTTE, others may have done so under duress, or as part of a broader compromise of mutual assistance with local groups of rebels in return for privileges, assistance or leniency with their own 'religious' work. This feeds into the broader narrative of the Church engaged in a 'working relationship' wherein the defacto power of the LTTE was recognised and worked with for the sake of reinforcing the local authority and freedom of the Church. Vitally, such activities were never publically authorised or condoned.

In close, rural communities, LTTE cadres would often not have been anonymous, armed strangers but known to priests, perhaps ex-parishioners or students. In such a context the embedded nature of the clergy who were members of the community they served is vital; the individual plight of those suffering was not seen in isolation from the political causes behind the conflict. The Catholic response to the ethnic problem is to stress we are saved not as individuals but as community.[27] As such,

[26] Unfortunately, several attacks on Churches did occur in which large numbers of civilians were killed, exposing the limits to such 'sanctuary'.
[27] Tamil Catholic priest, northern Sri Lanka, December 2010, (interview 1725)

contradictory narratives of protection and loyalty can be combined with broader opposition to the LTTE. Priests were part of these communities, with strong connections to them and a religious mandate of care also related to the work of 'social service'. Such complexity belies ideas of 'peace' or 'violence' being self-evident or easily accessible components of any action. Some priests also proactively took on other, more risky forms of sheltering. One interviewee spoke about an extensive, long term and well organized system he developed to provide protection for individuals at risk from the LTTE. Hiding such people was an extremely dangerous endeavor, and sometimes, clergy-organized 'safe houses' were inadequate. On such occasions, this interviewee explained that those at risk could be interned in government prisons for their own protection, some of which had even been refashioned for these purposes[28].

The business of protection and 'organising' bodies was interpreted as a part of the mandate of the Church's role of 'social service' in a humanitarian context. For some, with sympathy to the LTTE, or in a position where pragmatism was required, this meant bringing 'violent bodies' into the very spaces renowned for sanctuary. For those resisting the LTTE's ruthless approach to opponents it meant risking the privilege of such space by welcoming in and assisting those whose presence may invite that violence closer. In these examples we see a physical dimension of border making, where both vulnerable and violent bodies were granted access into privileged, 'sacred' space. Clearly these are contradictory processes but the 'borders' involved are physical; lines demarcating space 'set aside' in an ideal boundary construction have been pragmatically weakened to allow crossings of another kind. Borders apparently separate two distinct spaces, but actually they often serve to hide the reality of multiplicity; their practice and existence undermines the very binaries that they draw upon.

Support for the Tamil cause rarely equated to support for the LTTE, or necessarily separatism, but did facilitate a highly politicised Tamil Catholic Church. Typically, this was presented as an appropriate religious agenda, wherein the language of liberation and humanitarianism was interwoven with understandings of the nature of religion. One priest's sentiments, 'of course the Church is political- the welfare of man is the concern of religious leaders'[29], neatly reflected the logic of the majority of Tamil priests interviewed. From this perspective the internalisation of social and humanitarian responsibility provides the impetus for political intervention that would be constructed as illegitimate without the service element. National Church hierarchy challenged such constructions, objecting to preaching about 'political' issues, and pressurising politically outspoken priests. Along with government accusations of priests' political sentiments and statements being inflammatory, the response of the southern Church to political and humanitarian work also fed into the idea of northern priests being 'white tigers', illegitimately using their religious role to gain access to political space for political ends. Central leadership typically

[28] Tamil priest and human rights activist, United Kingdom, April 2013, (interview 2112)
[29] Op cite

dealt with the more radical Tamil priests by placing pressure on them to leave Sri Lanka, though there were no public excommunications. The profession and performance of extreme boundaries is not necessarily ultimately practiced. The Church has issued statements calling on the government to account for dead and missing priests, but they never acknowledge any controversy about their deaths or loyalties. The whitewashing of LTTE association reflects an inability to internalise these roles, displaying the limits of transformatory challenges. These limits are in no small part related to the Sinhalese Church's attempts to protect itself in the national climate which is increasingly hostile to Christianity; 'In the south, the position is precarious: speaking of problems in the north leads to Buddhist accusations of supporting the LTTE and there is a large anti-Christian feeling anyway. Police and security are very present, and there is fear to speak out.'[30] The muted response to the conflict and distancing of the central Church from the situation is typically regarded with disappointment and anger in the north. The central Church has been instrumental in the ability of Catholic humanitarian aid to pass into the north, in large part because of its relations with government. However for Tamil priests on the frontlines of aid's distribution it remains largely a distant and inadequate partner. As a priest heavily involved in humanitarian aid explained - 'once you become involved with the poor you begin challenging the Catholic Church as an institution.'[31] The debates and struggles between central and Tamil hierarchies illustrate that boundaries chosen to represent what is internal or external to 'pure' Catholicism, along with actions appropriate for priests to take, are moveable and reflect political necessity.

The humanitarian work of the Church, which often strayed into political arenas and brushed daily against the proximity of the violence of conflict, reinforced the strength of the Church in Tamil areas whilst consolidating criticism from outside of it. Throughout the war there was great pressure from the central Church to refrain from preaching on 'human rights'. [32] Some priests who were working in organisations explicitly seeking to engage conflict and its impacts were challenged by the central Church. Some were closed down on the grounds their work was 'not religious'.[33] Interviewees related the condemnation that was poured upon the Bishop of Mannar from the south when he met with LTTE leader Prabhakaran, as people questioned, 'is he a religious or a political leader?'[34] This reinforced notions of distinct spheres of operation, overlooking the complexities of mediation, communication and advocacy. 'Moral capital' was sometimes traded in for pragmatic causes such as protection, or even political beliefs; however this was understood by most in the north as a purer form of morality than a de-politicised and abstract notion of peacefulness, suffering quietly under injustice. Indeed, the interpretation of the mission of Jesus Christ in the gospel as 'liberation' has

[30] Catholic Sinhalese nun and humanitarian worker, Colombo, December 2010, (interview 1628)
[31] Senior Tamil priest and humanitarian worker, northern Sri Lanka, December 2010 (interview 1572)
[32] Tamil priest and human rights activist, United Kingdom, April 2013, (interview 2112)
[33] Tamil priest, United Kingdom, April 2013, (interview 2314)
[34] Tamil priest and human rights activist, United Kingdom, April 2013, (interview 2112)

profoundly impacted northern priests who identify with the 'Tamil cause'. One of the great powers, or capitals, of religion itself is the varied narratives offered which can be drawn upon to legitimate not only goals, such as 'peace' but also the means to achieve them.

One story to emerge through this research was of a remote, northern village parish's Easter play in 2012. Reportedly, in the play whilst Jesus was on the cross Barabbas was depicted being questioned by Pilate. He proclaimed himself to be a liberation fighter, happy to sacrifice his life for a cause. The focus on Barabbas, the leader of physical revolt against Roman occupation rather than on Jesus, the heavenly Messiah is interesting because of its theological marginality. On a small scale as well as within broader Church hierarchy the ideals of liberation have been internalised and reproduced as explicitly religious sentiment. In the post-war north a pervasive militarisation meant that public meetings were monitored by the military, indeed many priests complained of being forced to minister the Eucharist to uniformed officers. And yet, in this atmosphere, the language of liberation was afoot in the religious performance of festival celebration. The choice of Barabbas as the figure upon whom to personalise the Tamil struggle and themes of liberation, rather than Jesus, is subversive toward Catholic hierarchy and doctrine as well as politico-military control. When the discursive boundaries prescribed by powerful and distanced central institutions conflict with the aims of local actors and are not accepted within their rationale, they can be re-defined. This representation of Barabbas was too obscure and politically and religiously incendiary to have spread, but even as an isolated incident it is interesting. It raises questions about the manner in which large institutions can influence and contain their offshoots. The Sri Lankan Church has struggled to contain the Tamil Church's theology and activity, yet cannot separate from it without undermining its own existence. Similarly, individual priests and parishes can go 'rogue' within the Tamil Church's carefully managed humanitarian agenda with interesting and unexpected results.

Divisions within the Church are far more complex than simple ethnic differences but represent existential challenges. For Tamil clergy, it was a practical and theological imperative for the Church to engage in the unfolding crisis precipitated by violent conflict, and doing so reproduced the Church as a vital institution in that context. For Sinhalese leadership, the perils of navigating loyalties to their religious and ethnic brethren were heightened by their proximity to government, and dependence upon good relations with it to exist and function at all. The struggle facing the central Church hierarchy in light of the challenges presented from the north were well illustrated by Archbishop Oswald Gomis who made a statement at the end of the war that infuriated many Tamil Catholics:

> I congratulate His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapakse, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, for his very courageous leadership and thank the Chiefs of the Defense outfit who supported him with deep commitment and self-sacrifice. I also offer my deepest sympathies

> to those who laid down their lives in battle and those innocent civilians killed, trapped in war.[35]

He went on to appeal for peace to be established through unity and equality but this did little to blunt the anger of northern clergy who had lived through decades of war, and a 'final solution' in which atrocity ran rife. Subsequently, Cardinal Ranjith has supported the government's refusal to permit an international war crimes inquiry, whilst the northern Bishops have been instrumental in pushing for one, and collating evidence to submit to it. The stark and incongruous response of Sinhalese Catholic figureheads has been widely lamented and illuminates that a lack of response to violence and its social effects can itself be a political act:

> 'It is something else entirely when the Cardinal at a ceremony organized by the government to honor him, calls the war a 'humanitarian operation'. This sets such a bad example, and must corrupt his very conscience to call black white in this way. He did also say that there were people who needed to be re-settled; perhaps this is to ease his own conscience. In reality, thousands have been gunned down in cold blood and he does not speak out about it.[36]

Central leader's conflicted and stunted message exemplifies the contrasting frameworks and boundaries within which rhetoric from the Church's leadership plays out. It assists in a performance of the role of the Church as subject to politics, whilst separate from it; a Church that can also offer moral guidance. It reflects the impotence of Sinhalese leaders constrained by ethnic loyalties and the closedown of political space, and clashes with the activist stance of the northern Church that has inscribed its political agenda onto its religious persona. We can see then, that boundaries and borders are about power, revealing of the need of the powerful for binaries, which legitimate their own existence, and a space within which to perform it. The Archbishop's statement reveals that when people attempt to straddle a boundary rather than taking a definite stance supporting one position, they lose power in each.

Conclusion

If we are to productively examine the ways in which religion becomes entangled with violence we must move away from esoteric arguments about religion's nature and turn to it as a relational phenomenon. Asking what, how and why religious actors have engaged violent circumstances requires consideration of the everyday functions of religion, and practicalities of existence in such situations. To do so, we must also consider the historic factors precipitating religious formations. At major junctures in the recent history of Sri Lanka it is possible to observe the centrality of boundary and border management as religion and its functionaries seek to reproduce their position and engagements as legitimate and authoritative -

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[35] Gomis, Archbishop Osawald 18.05.2009, 'Press Release of the Archbishop of Colombo on the Conclusion of the War', cited by Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, Sri Lanka, www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20030518_15, accessed 05..8.2014

[36] Sinhalese Catholic political commentator, Colombo, December 2010, (interview 1948)

uncontaminated by dirty, political agendas. This often necessitates 'taking liberties' with prevailing conceptions of religion, seeking to expand or change them for the important work of making new kinds of liberty. Buddhist monks engaged in the JVP insurgency sought to lay claim on political space through expanded boundaries and borders of legitimate religion. More recently, Catholic priests in northern conflict zones have worked both to expand the remit of legitimate religious intervention through narratives of humanitarianism, whilst strengthening other physical borders as 'sacred space'. Despite different circumstances behind the cases, use of similar tactics in these spaces illustrates that religion is not static, and can be actively engaged and manipulated by those in and outside of it. Such activity reveals the intimacy between religion and what it seeks to deem as 'other' to it.

Just as the JVP monks embrace of violent politics existentially challenged the sangha, the humanitarian activities of politicised Tamil Catholic priests have contributed to and exposed deep fractures within the institutional Church. However, whereas the 'defeat' of JVP insurgency also marked a failure of associated monks' attempts to internalise their violent activities within 'true' Buddhism, the humanitarian service and boundary traversing work of Tamil priests has bolstered their local authority and legitimacy. The case of Catholic priests in conflict illustrates more the pragmatism of religion in conflict where actors have the aim of social engagement as well as more broadly, their own survival. The manipulation and navigation of boundaries and borders through re-defining spheres of legitimacy have been contested within both institutions, and here issues of power are central.

Considering Catholic Tamil 'white tigers' against the backdrop of JVP monks sheds light onto the religion-politics nexus commonly debated in Sri Lankan studies and suggests some broader commonalities for the study of religion in conflict. The centrality of borders and boundaries and management of them underwrites the performance of religion in controversial circumstances. In doing so it undermines the very binaries drawn upon to legitimise activity as specifically 'religious' or not. Although I have considered and agreed with earlier work that argues religion and politics are discursive categories with shifting meaning, rather than essentialised categories, I have continued to draw upon such terms not least because the actors themselves do so. Religion is bound to social action, having important everyday functions. It is reproduced in and through the violent circumstances it may be implicated in; or it exists alongside them as actors seek to make new kinds of liberty and legitimacy.

In the Catholic Church, which is struggling to reproduce itself as a unified entity in light of internal ethnic fractures, charges of priests as 'white tigers' speak to the heart of the power struggles not only within the institution, but as it seeks to navigate and survive Sri Lanka's current political reality. Ultimately, although boundaries and borders thrive through appearing to be absolute, it is nearly always possible to negotiate and traverse them. In doing so, both the actor and the boundary are transformed. However, power remains ultimate with regards to the

opening or closing of space and possibility for crossing physical borders or discursive boundaries. These then are about much more than binaries and central not only to survival in and navigation of warscapes, but the reproduction of the religious self within them (as they are transformed through them). Boundaries and borders are about multiplicity; - undermining the binaries that they draw upon; about movement; - revealing the tactical nature of such binaries, and about power; - showing binaries serve to legitimise those who have the ability to establish them.

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